

SEE THE UNSEEN

- A. Introduction: The single most important thing you can do for both your spiritual and your physical life is become a Bible reader. Many Christians struggle with reading the Bible. Those who do read often read ineffectively. This series is aimed at inspiring you to read, as we overcome obstacles to effective reading.
1. I'm encouraging you to become a regular systematic reader of the New Testament. Regular reading means you read for a short period of time—say 15-20 minutes, at least four or five days a week (if not more). Systematic means that instead of reading random verses you read each book from start to finish.
 - a. Don't stop to look up words or consult a commentary. You can do that at another time. Don't worry about what you don't understand. Just read.
 - b. The purpose of this type of reading is to become familiar with the text. Understanding comes with familiarity, and familiarity comes with regular repeated reading of the New Testament.
 2. As part of our discussion we are addressing why you should read and what regular systematic reading will do for you. Last week we talked about the fact this type of reading changes the way you see things (your perspective) which in turn changes how you deal with life. We have more to say tonight.
 - a. We looked at a statement that the apostle Paul made in the context of the many hardships and difficulties he faced in his life. (Remember, he was personally instructed by Jesus. Gal 1:11-12)
 1. Paul wrote II Cor 4:17-18—For our present troubles are quite small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see right now; rather, we look forward to what we have not yet seen. For the troubles we see will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever (NLT).
 - A. Paul's view of his troubles was that they were temporary and the ultimate end of all of it is great glory. The troubles weren't as big as they seemed in the moment, and in comparison to the final outcome, not as catastrophic as they seemed. So, they didn't weigh him down.
 - B. Remember, perspective is the power to see or think of things in their true relationship to each other, according to *Webster's Dictionary*.
 2. Paul stated how he developed this perspective. He learned to look at (focus his attention on) what he couldn't see. The only way you can see the unseen is through God's Word.
 - b. God, who is invisible, presides over an unseen kingdom of full power and provision, populated by invisible beings known as angels. Not seen doesn't mean not real. It simply means that we can't contact it with our five senses. I Tim 1:17; Col 1:16; etc.
 1. This unseen or spiritual realm has the greater reality because it preceded and then produced the visible physical world. The Invisible God spoke His invisible Word and released invisible power that created not only an unseen realm, but a seen world. Gen 1:3; Heb 11:3
 2. The unseen can affect and change the visible world. When Jesus was on earth He released unseen power and produced tangible results in the seen world. Mark 4:39; Matt 8:3; etc.
 3. Almighty God is invisible and omnipresent—present everywhere at once. No matter where you are, there He is. No matter where you are or what you are facing, you always have invisible help—God who is with you and for you. When you become convinced of this, it changes your perspective.
- B. We see the unseen through the Bible. Paul's view of reality came from the Word of God—first, from the Old Testament and then from the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.
1. The Old Testament is the portion of the Bible that was completed by the time that Paul became a believer in Jesus. The Old Testament is primarily a history of the people group through whom Jesus came into this world (the people of Israel, the Jews).
 - a. Prior to his conversion to Christ, Paul was a Pharisee (a Jewish religious leader) and was thoroughly schooled in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is filled with accounts of real people who got

real help from God in the midst of real problems.

- b. Paul's view of reality was further expanded through the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. After Paul was converted, Jesus taught him the message he preached and recorded in the New Testament.
 - c. The New Testament was written after Jesus returned to Heaven following His crucifixion and resurrection. The New Testament it is a record of what the Old anticipated and predicted. John 5:39
 1. That's why we begin our regular reading with the New Testament. The Old Testament is much easier to understand once you become familiar with the fulfillment described in the New.
 2. The Bible is progressive revelation. God has gradually revealed Himself and His plan of salvation through His Word until we have the full revelation given in Jesus. Heb 1:1-3
2. Consider some Old Testament passages that would have helped to shape Paul's view of reality. A thousand years before Paul was born, Israel's great king David wrote a number of psalms. You may recall that David experienced great adversity in his life—but God kept and ultimately delivered David.
 - a. In one psalm David wrote that there's no place God is not: "You both precede and follow me...I can never escape from your spirit! I can never get away from your presence. If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the place of the dead, you are there (Ps 139:5-8, NLT).
 - b. David spent a good portion of his adult life on the run from men intent on destroying him. In one of those times he wrote that God was his help and salvation (the help of his countenance, KJV). Ps 42:5
 1. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the word used in this verse literally means face. However, most of the time, it is used figuratively—often as a substitute for the entire person.
 2. When God promised Moses He would go with him from Egypt to Israel God said: My presence will go with you (Ex 33:14-15). Presence is the same Hebrew word that David used. David literally wrote: God's presence is salvation: My present Salvation, and my God (Spurrell)
 3. David knew that God with him is the salvation or help that he needed. God is bigger than everything, nothing surprises Him, and He sees a way to use it for good. David knew that God would get him through. When we read David's story, we see that is exactly what happened.
 - c. Paul would have been familiar with another major event in Israel's history. When God delivered Israel from Egyptian slavery and led them back to their ancestral lands (Canaan), the Lord gave them His word that He would defeat their enemies and settle them safely in the land.
 1. When Israel reached the border of Canaan a reconnaissance party was sent in first—before the rest of the people entered. The spies came back with a report of walled cities, fierce tribes, and unusually large men (giants). Num 13:26-29
 2. The people of Israel had two sources of information in this situation: what they could see (formidable obstacles in the land) and what they couldn't see (God perfectly present with them in power to overcome those obstacles and settle them in the land).
 - A. The perspective of two of spies (Joshua and Caleb) was shaped by the unseen information: Caleb declared: We can certainly conquer the land (Num 13:30, NLT). Joshua declared: Don't be afraid of the people of the land. They are only helpless prey to us! They have no protection, but the Lord is with us! Don't be afraid of them! (Num 14:9, NLT).
 - B. The other spies and the rest of Israel allowed only what they could see to determine their view of reality and refused to cross the border into Canaan. Num 13:31-33
 3. Note one point in this account. Everyone's view of reality view affected how they dealt with their circumstances which then affected the final result. Only Joshua and Caleb eventually entered Canaan and settled safely. The rest of the people spent the remainder of their lives living a nomadic life in a wilderness region between Egypt and Canaan.
 3. Although this historical account is inspiring, many have trouble transferring the lessons it teaches into our own lives for several reasons. For now, note one reason why we have difficulty with it.
 - a. Even if we accept the premise that God is present with us because He is omnipresent, we struggle

with believing that He will come through for us. We're well acquainted with our shortcomings and failures and wrestle with a fear that God won't help us because of our issues.

- b. Consider a few passages from another psalm written by David: The Lord is merciful and gracious; he is slow to get angry and full of unfailing love...The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. For he knows we are only dust...our days on earth are like grass...the wind blows, and we are gone...But the love of the Lord remains forever with those who fear him (Ps 103:8; 13-17, NLT).
4. This is why understanding the big picture is so important. By big picture I mean what this is all about—why Almighty God created us in the first place and what He is working to accomplish in this world.
 - a. God created human beings to become His sons and daughters through faith in Christ. He made the earth to be a home for Himself and His family. The Bible begins and ends with God and His family on earth enjoying an unbroken loving relationship. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18; Gen 2-3; Rev 21-22; etc.
 1. The human race and the earth have been damaged by sin (going back to Adam). As a result, humans are now born with a fallen nature and become guilty before God when they inevitably sin. And, this planet is infused with a curse of corruption and death. It's no longer a fit forever home for God and His family. Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; Rom 5:19; Rom 8:20; etc.
 2. God devised a plan to deliver men and women from this condition through Jesus. Jesus would take on human nature and die for our sins. By His sacrifice, He opened the way for all who put faith in Him to become sons and daughters of God. Jesus will soon return to earth, restore the family home by His unseen power, and complete God's plan for a family in a perfect world.
 - b. This entire plan was initiated by God who was motivated by love to have a family through Jesus. Paul's perspective was shaped by this fact. Consider these statements also written by Paul.
 1. Eph 1:4-5—Long ago, even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure (NLT).
 2. Rom 5:8—But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners (NLT). (This sounds a lot like John 3:16—For God so loved the world that He sent His son to die for us so that a process of transformation could take place in us.)
 3. Rom 8:35-37—Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or are hungry or cold or in danger or threatened with death...No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us (NLT).
 5. When you understand the big picture you see that God isn't looking for ways to get away from you. He's working to complete His plan for a family in a perfect home where you and He can live forever.
 - a. I Pet 3:18—Jesus died to bring us safely home to God (NLT). Phil 1:6—And I am sure that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again (NLT).
 - b. II Tim 1:9—It is God who saved us and chose us to live a holy life. He did this not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan long before the world began—to show his love and kindness to us through Christ Jesus (NLT).
- C. None of this means that we'll have a problem free life or that every situation will turn out the way we want it to. We live in a fallen world and life is filled with unavoidable loss, hurts, and disappointments. John 16:33
 1. This means that the overall plan of God for your life—sonship and a forever home with Him in a perfect world—will be completed. And this is where your perspective or how you see things makes all the difference.

- a. Paul was able to view his difficulties as momentary and light because he saw the big picture. He recognized that every hardship he faced was temporary and that, in comparison to what is ahead for God's family (after this life), even a life time of hardship is not that big. Rom 8:18
 1. This doesn't mean he enjoyed his troubles or never experienced negative emotions. He talked about being sorrowful and the burden of caring for the churches (II Cor 6:10; II Cor 11:28-29). But he saw it all in a way that lessened the emotional and mental weight and gave him hope.
 2. Paul's perspective was actually an eternal perspective. An eternal perspective lives with the awareness that there is more to life than just this life and the greater and better part of our existence is ahead, after this life.
 - b. Remember, the things we cannot see include the invisible reality of God perfectly present with us and for us to help us now. But it also includes things we can't see because they are still to come—future restoration and reunion when God's plan for a family on earth is finally completed. Acts 3:21
 2. Regular systematic reading of the New Testament builds this reality into your consciousness. Not only will it help you become aware that God is with you and for you, it will give you an eternal perspective.
 - a. An eternal perspective informs and upholds your present perspective. Even if things don't work out now, it's not the end of my story. There's more to come and what is ahead far outweighs my present trouble. This perspective gives hope and lightens the load.
 - b. It takes time and effort to develop such a perspective and learn to override the emotions that arise when we encounter trouble. Remember what Paul wrote in the middle of his statement that we are victors in the midst of life's troubles (Rom 8:37).
 1. For I have come through a process of persuasion to a settled conclusion that (nothing)...will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:38, Wuest).
 2. The New Testament was written in Greek. The Greek word used for persuasion comes from a word that means to convince by argument. This word is the root of the word translated faith.
 3. God's Word is the source of faith. It persuades us of things we cannot see, so much so that our view of reality and our actions are changed and we live with confidence and hope. Rom 10:17
- D. Conclusion: We have more to say next week, but as we close I need to address two objections that people bring up in connection with regular systematic reading of the New Testament.
1. I've had people ask me: Why do we have to read the Bible regularly and systematically? The early Christians didn't read like this. They didn't have Bibles in their homes and most of them couldn't read.
 - a. Although that is true, it doesn't mean they got no regular exposure to the Bible. We know from the writings of the church fathers (the next generation of leaders who had been taught by the apostles) that when Christians met on Sunday "the memoirs of the apostles (the gospels) or the writings of the prophets were read as long as time permits" (Justin Martyr, died in AD 165).
 - b. We also know that the first Christians memorized and recited creeds and sang hymns that were filled with doctrine (teaching that is now part of the New Testament). Several creeds and hymns are recorded in the New Testament. I Cor 15:1-4; Col 1:15-20; Phil 2:6-11; I Tim 3:16; Rom 11:33-36
 - c. There was no "24 hours 7 days a week" media onslaught with inaccurate or false ideas about God and the nature of reality. This input is difficult for us to avoid and it's impossible not to be influenced by some of. We must work to counteract this information it by keeping our focus on God's Word. Regular systematic reading helps you do this.
 2. I've had people tell me that they read the Bible through when they first became a Christian and don't see a need to read it over and over. Although what you did is commendable, it's no longer fresh, you didn't get everything out of it that you could, and as you grow in Christ your capacity to understand God's Word grows. The Bible is like food. You don't eat one meal and never eat again. Matt 4:4
 3. Become a regular systematic New Testament reader. You'll have more peace, joy, and faith.